



#WORKING WITH EUROPE COMMENT#

THIRD SECTOR ON THE MOVE?

© 2015 Jan Gejel
Senior European Project Manager

The so-called Third Sector is on the move across Europe, and in many countries. In this context the term Third Sector can refer to various sub-sectors, such as the Social Third Sector. The challenges are basically the same. This comment addresses the basic framework for such movements, and can of course be considerably elaborated and detailed.

Different words and approaches are employed to describe what is happening and what should happen, typically words like *internationalization*, *innovation* and *European cooperation*.

The Third Sector consists of a wide range of very different organisations and with very different missions. The sector is not well organized and to some extent also increasingly competitive, neither familiar with working in long-term strategies.

This calls for caution: whatever mission is launched for this sector, the mission must be very clearly defined. Is it about internationalization, innovation or European cooperation?

One thing is certain: if the mission is about “everything”, it will soon collapse and fail. This sector - or any other sector - is not able to face long-term high-level and complex strategic development.

So, the first step when creating strategic missions for the Third Sector should be to define *what the mission is about*.

Let's try to briefly and loosely indicate what the three mentioned strategies might cover, first of all to demonstrate how different they are.

Third Sector internationalization

- creating new markets for existing social services in for example Eastern Europe, South America and the emerging far-east economies
- creating new forms of social services for such exporting attempts
- creating more commercial mentality in the sector
- building capacity in the sector to manage such exporting challenges
- establishing cooperation with relevant social sector organisations across the world to increase volume, quality and capacity
- internationalizing Third Sector educations, including attracting international students to the region's social educations
- building a substantial social services knowledge base at international level to attract collaborators, researchers and students
- promoting international mobility of students and sector professionals in general

Third Sector innovation

- identifying new challenges and opportunities for the sector, based on changing Europe, changing policy and changing demographics
- innovating the services provided based on user-driven approaches and user co-creation, including mobilizing community resources in new ways, and including questioning the traditional provider-user dichotomy
- innovating Third Sector management to encourage professionals' taking action across organisations
- establishing social experimentations and social laboratories in communities

- engaging systematically in social innovation projects and missions
- establishing cross-sector joint ventures and funding
- innovating the funding of social services and social experimentation
- linking to 21st century learning and competence principles

Third Sector European cooperation

- creating economy and resources through European funding programs
- engaging in European collaboration and with Third Sector players from other European countries and cultures
- continuously analysing current and emerging European funding programs to identify relevant funding opportunities for different social services and different sub-sectors
- building considerable capacity to create successful applications in the increasingly competitive programs
- developing European engagement and capacity at strategic level, following the Commission's program periods (such as Europe 2014-20)
- establishing permanent high-level support functions at the centre of the sector to support quality European engagement
- building European mentality and capacity in Third Sector organisations

Evidently, such missions go in very different directions, call for very different capacity building and strategic development, and even funding - and will produce very different results.

Obviously, elements from all three missions might be combined, but that does not change the need to clearly place new initiatives within the frameworks of one of these missions.

One thing is sure: if new Third Sector initiatives from the beginning oscillates between those missions and not being able to define themselves clearly in this landscape of different strategies, missions and horizons, such initiatives will most likely die out quite early in the process.

Why?

Because they are not taking the proper steps and creating the proper resources to accomplish this specific strategic orientation...

The clarity of the concept, the sharpness of the strategies and the precise allocation of resources is a pre-condition for being successful in less organized and prepared sectors such as the Social Third Sector.

All this calls for a very competent and well-reflected early development of the mission and the strategies to accomplish the mission.

Creating this high-quality mission concept is in fact a mission in itself!

Short-cuts are not recommended: quality takes time, and high quality takes even more time. But it will demonstrate return on investment at the end...

What are the key and indispensable principles in such strategy creation at sector level?

Precisely because the possible new mission operates at *sector level*, a cautious and well-designed step-by step approach to the mission creation is needed.

We do not *move sectors* without high quality strategies. We might pretend to move them, but we are not.

Obviously there are two big phases in such engagement: the creation of the mission and its resources and the implementation of the mission.

Successful *implementation* of the mission is totally depending on the quality and success of the *creation* of the mission.

Many project and mission makers tend to underestimate what it takes to create a mission at sector level, including the mission's resources.

The first implementation of a considerable sector mission might last at least 3-5 years and this calls for a mission creation period of minimum 6 months, often between 6 and 12 months.

Why is that?

Because a mission creation at sector level includes a wide range of actions, collaboration and resources, such as for example (just to mention a few):

- creation of a crystal clear concept draft for the mission
- explaining how society and stakeholders will benefit
- mobilizing and forming a driver team relevant to the mission
- consensus building in the driver team
- development of a strong final concept for further capacity building
- open concept consultancy among key audiences
- consensus and dedication among key stakeholders in the sector
- evaluating consultancy and sector consensus
- aligning the further concept development with national and European policy
- creating the final concept and developing the mission strategy, including step-by-step actions and mobilizing of resources
- etc.

Evidently, such a mission creation process will last at least 6 months, and normally longer.

The mission process must be supported by experienced process professionals and must be driven by a strong team.

The key to a successful mission creation is what we call **progressive capacity building**.

The aim of the mission creation is to launch the mission, based on strong consensus, well-described action plans and appropriate funding.

To reach this aim progressive capacity building is needed.

The rationale of the progressive capacity building is to build up mission capacity step-by-step to enable the driver team to successfully work its way through alliances, support and concrete resource creation towards the final aim: a well-described action plan, substantial involvement and dedication and solid funding.

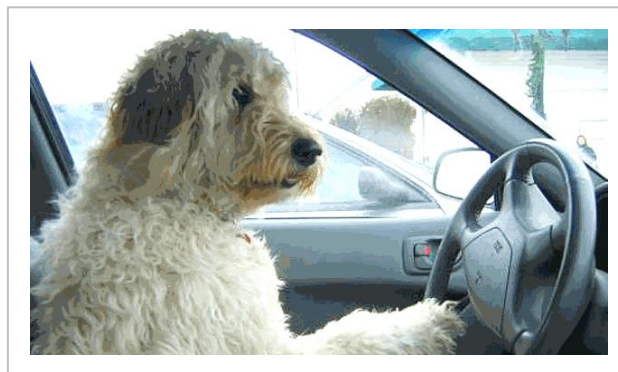
Let us to briefly describe those capacity building steps.

The logic of each capacity building step is:

- based on what we accomplished in the last step, we can now...
- based on what we will accomplish in the current step, we will be able to...

The model is very similar to how computer games are designed, and there is a lot to be learned from such game design.

The entire capacity building process is put to work for a very simple reason: we are not strong enough to make the “giant leap” from point zero and to the launch of the mission! We are simply not able; we need to build capacity to do it.

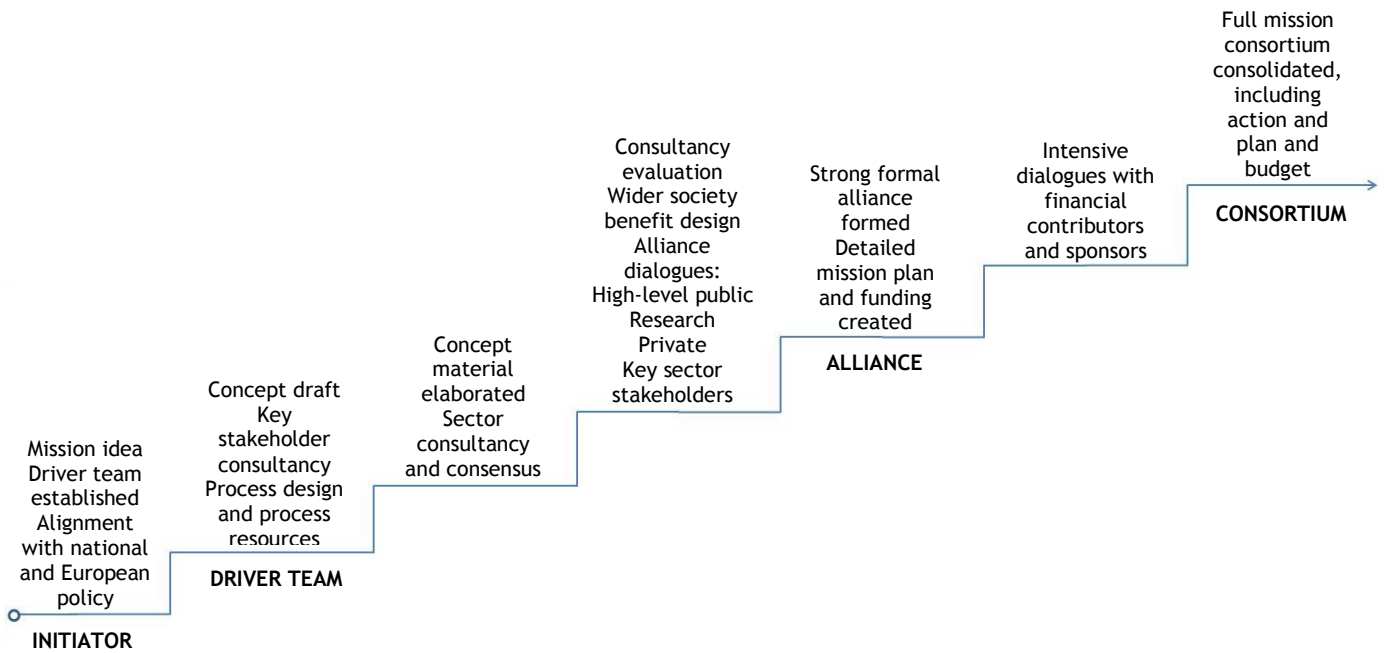


Third Sector on the move - but who is driving?

In case of for example the Third Sector Innovation mission, mentioned above, typical steps might be as illustrated below.

In case of one of the other three missions, similar processes are needed, but including different steps.

Illustration of the progressive mission creation and capacity building 6-12 months



Having worked through this capacity building, the mission can be launched and implemented, most likely along a 3-5 years first mission phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Take the mission creation process very seriously; a successful mission creation is half the mission



Make sure to progressively form a very strong Driver Team, Alliance and Consortium with sufficient progression and taking action capacity



Put a lot of effort in the written material. It must be crystal clear, must explain the benefit of all stakeholders - and the story must be told differently to different stakeholders



Avoid taking action not well prepared; rather go through the step again and ensure the needed resources and capacity



Link strongly to the wider benefit of society, including to changing Europe; and give concrete examples of the expected impact of the mission



When creating the overall mission and mission resources: think big and solidly; small conceived projects fail



Do not accept informal support and good will: the stakeholders in the Driver Team, Alliance and Consortium must dedicate themselves to responsible and long-term action



Make efforts to fund the mission creation process (6-12 months) itself, as this will add considerable quality to the process and will force the players to act responsibly